

Unique Black Women Cont'd.

the age of 91, she regularly rode horseback across the state to visit friends and her husband's grave.

Although Lucy Terry Prince was the first Black to publish a poem her fame has been eclipsed by **Phyllis Wheatley**, who had been born in Africa in 1761 and brought to America as a child. In less than two years, she was able to read and speak English fluently. Several years later, she was able to translate Latin. This gifted young poet's talents were recognized quite early by her owners, and she was encouraged to practice her art.

By the time she reached her teens, she was an accomplished poetress. Her book, **Poems on Various Subjects, Religions and Moral** was published in 1773, making her the first Black to have a book published in the colonies. This made her internationally famous and she was invited to England when she was twenty years old. There she enjoyed the attention of the English press.

After she returned to the colonies, her life became radically changed, for her owners died and manumission (freedom) left her without the care and support she had enjoyed before.

Wheatley married a freedman and bore three children. Never strong in health, she died in poverty in her early thirties.

Besides her love of writing, one of the highlights of her career was her visit with George Washington.

Another young Black woman was to figure, literally, in the life of George Washington.

During the Revolutionary War, whenever Washington was in the New York area, he and his officers often dined in Fraunces Tavern which still stands and operates in what is now known as Greenwich Village. Samuel Fraunces, born in the West Indies, used his daughter **Phoebe** as hostess. As such, she was responsible for seeing to the comfort of important customers. Therefore, whenever Washington came in to meet or dine with his men, Phoebe was in complete charge of preparations.

At this time, she was ardently pursued by a British officer. Using his relationship with Phoebe to learn of Washington's plans, he "happened by" on a particular evening. While the young lady was busy at the General's table, the soldier poisoned a dish that was about to be served. Phoebe, learning this after the food had been placed on the table, hurried into the dining room and cried out a warning just in time. Because of this, Phoebe and her father enjoyed Washington's friendship even after he became president.

Black women have long been willing to help save the lives of others, or to contribute their time and energies to significantly improve the quality of the lives of their people.

Well-known is the incredible story of **Harriet Tubman's** successful career as the "conductor on the Underground Railroad." Her guiding of over three hundred slaves to freedom, was aided by the establishment of the "Railroad" by benevolent men and women, mostly white, who were staunch abolitionists.



Harriet Tubman, master spy.

Not all of the Railroad's "agents" (as those who offered slaves hiding places, rides, etc. were called) were white, however. **Frances Watkins Harper** offered her home as a "station" on the Railroad.

Born in 1825 in Maryland to free parents, her status was threatened by a state law passed in 1851. Now a refugee, she took teaching posts in Ohio and then Pennsylvania. In the latter state she witnessed the awful conditions under which other refugees from slavery were living, and she became determined to help them in every way possible.

She went on a lecture tour to acquaint people throughout the Northeast of the conditions that slavery produced, and to seek financial aid to support the abolitionists' cause. A prolific writer, all of the money that she collected from her publishings and lectures she donated to "The Cause."

Well-documented is the life of another lecturer against the evils of slavery, **Isabella Baumfree**. Born in New York City in the 1790's, she lived with other slaves in the basement of a hotel owned by her Dutch master. Sold to another named Dumont after she became orphaned, she remained there, married and produced a family. When New York manumitted its slaves, Dumont refused to release his. Isabella ran away, leaving her family behind.



Phoebe saving George Washington from poisoning.

Following the lead of her early sisters, she brought suit in court twice; once to force the return of a son who had been sold into slavery, and the second time to sue a man for libel when he accused her of a murder of which she had been acquitted. She won both times.

When she felt the "call" to preach, she changed her name to **Sojourner Truth** and became a dynamic speaker at anti-slavery and women's rights meetings. At one of the meetings where she spoke, a man told her that he thought no more about what she said than a flea-bite. Sojourner replied:

"Maybe not, but the Lord willin; I'll keep you scratchin'."

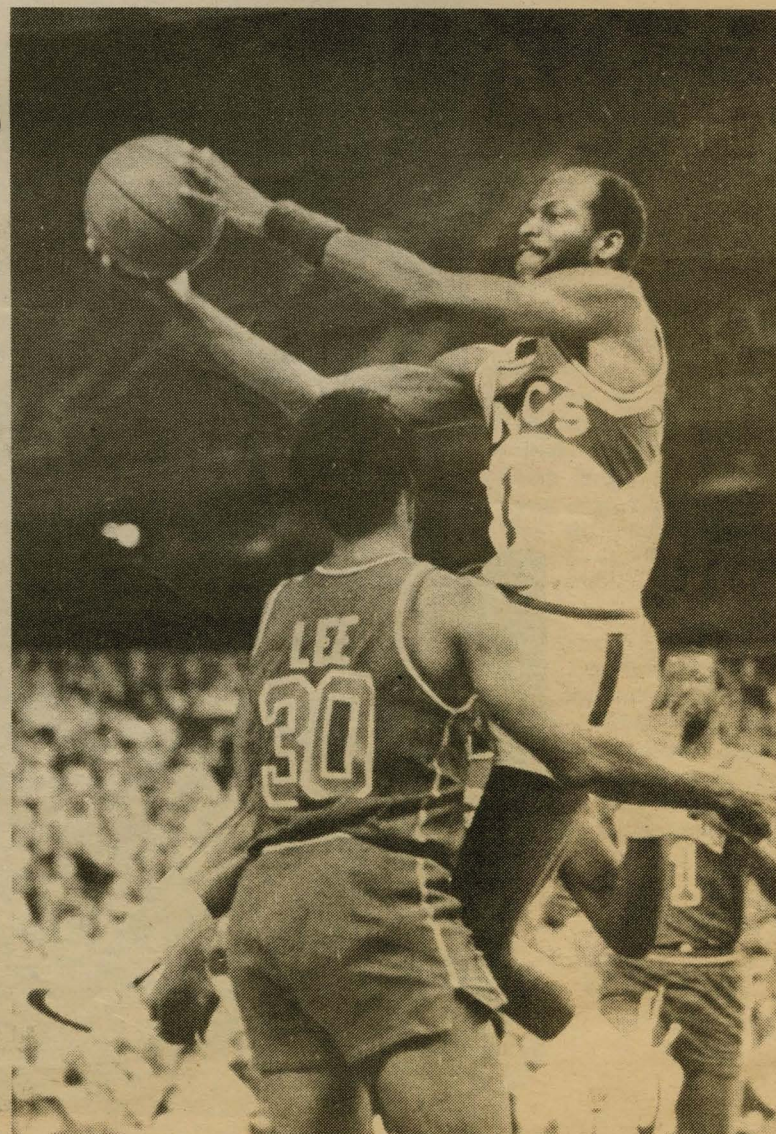
Protests against slavery were not offered exclusively by those called "abolitionists." The form of one of the protests was perhaps the first organized boycott against slavery by Northern Blacks. It was instituted when Judith James and Laetitia Rowley organized the Colored Female Produce Society in 1831. Exhorting consumers to purchase goods only produced by free labor, they hoped to undermine the economy of the South and thus render slavery invalid. Although meeting with limited success, it served notice to all that strength there could be in a collective effort by

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